UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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INTERIOR DEPARTMENT INITIATES NEGOTIATIONS FOR FUR SEAL PROCESSING CONTRACT

The Department of the Interior announced today that negotiations will be started late this month with firms seeking a contract for processing Alaska sealskins for the United States Government.

The three firms invited to participate in negotiations are: Superior Seal, Inc., Chicago, Illinois; Pierre Laclede Fur Company, St. Louis, Missouri; Fouke Fur Company, Greenville, South Carolina.

Each of the companies has been required to submit with its proposal to the Government samples of processed furs for use in a three-phase evaluation program. This program consisted of an evaluation of the sealskins by a panel of experts from various Federal agencies, physical and chemical tests conducted by the National Bureau of Standards, and a marketability study based on garments manufactured from the sample sealskins.

Each year Interior's Bureau of Commercial Fisheries harvests some 80,000 fur seals on the Pribilof Islands in Alaska. These surplus animals are taken from a herd of about 1,500,000 animals which is managed under the terms of an international agreement with Canada, Japan, and the USSR. The agreement provides that Canada and Japan shall each receive 15 percent of the sealskins harvested on the Pribilof Islands.

Following curing of the sealskins on the Pribilofs by the Government, the skins are shipped to a processor who dresses and dyes them under contract. The furs are then sold at semiannual auctions for the account of the United States Government.

During the last auction, in April this year, the two types of furs into which Alaska seal are processed brought average prices of \$90.60 and \$48.82 per skin.